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THURSDAY, November 2, 1933
U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "Indoor Herb Gardens for Thrifty Kitchens." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry and the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

--ooOoo--

You never can tell what you're going to find when you go poking into other people's pantries. I stepped into my next-door neighbor's back pantry the other day, looking for a jar of jam, and what do you suppose I found? I found a garden growing on the pantry window sill. No, not a garden of house plants. It was a kitchen herb garden.

Mistress Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
With parsley and thyme
And other seasonings fine,
And onions all set in a row.

My neighbor is a woman of imagination. As I've told you before, she thinks up all sorts of thrifty ways to provide her family with good meals at low cost. She has always raised her own herb garden in summer just as old-fashioned housewives used to do back in the days of our grandmothers. But this year she decided to grow her own seasonings both summer and winter, so she has set out her indoor herb garden on the pantry window, which happens to face south. And she says she expects to pick fresh parsley to garnish her platters in the middle of January and to have fresh sprouts of onions and chives for soups and salads and stews when the snow is blowing against the window pane.

Did I hear somebody say that seasonings were mere frills and had no place in an economy diet? My neighbor will be willing to argue with anyone on that point. She says that the less money she has to spend for food, the more carefully she has to guard against monotony in using the same staple foods over and over again. She counts a great deal on different seasonings to vary the everyday dishes. And most of the seasonings she uses cost next to nothing, because she grows them herself. Just ask my neighbor. She'll tell you that seasonings used wisely stimulate appetite and lift the family's spirits, no matter how the weather is outside. You know how it goes. You know yourself, how a bit of fresh green parsley or crisp watercress can dress up a winter dish.

Well, now let's consider a few practical points about planting and caring for your winter herb garden. Some of the seasoning plants with deep roots, like parsley, you can raise in flower pots. The smaller plants, like chives, will grow on the window sill in fern pans. But perhaps the best arrangement for your window garden is a wooden window box on the sill. Make the box to eight inches deep and six to ten inches wide. Don't put in any bottom. Fasten the box on a



light, galvanized iron tray, two inches deep and about an inch longer and wider than the wooden box. Place an inch of small stones in the bottom of the box, this will allow for good drainage. You can supply moisture by pouring half an inch or so of water in the metal tray but don't let water stand in the tray all of the time. Oh, yes, and you can paint the box and tray to go with the color scheme of the room.

Now about soil. Mix equal parts of garden loam, rotted manure and gritty sand. That combination will hold moisture well and won't cake down too hard.

Most of your herbs you'll raise from seeds. Only a few cents spent on seeds will give you a generous supply of seasoning herbs.

Now about the herbs themselves. Put parsley at the head of your winter garden list. The Emerald or Dwarf Curled parsley is one variety good for raising indoors because it is a compact plant. Another is Perfection parsley or Peerless. Parsley seed is slow to germinate, so soak it for twenty-four hours in tepid water before you plant it. Oh, yes, and be sure the parsley seed is fresh.

Onion shoots make excellent seasoning for winter salads or creamed dishes--yes, and for winter soups and stews and other low-cost mixtures. The same holds true with chives, a mild cousin of the onion, also very useful in winter salads.

That old-fashioned herb, thyme, has always been a favorite for flavoring soup, stews or gravy. You can grow it in any sunny window, even with an occasional down-to-freezing temperature. Don't cover thyme seed when you plant it. Just press it into the surface of the soil.

You can raise mint indoors, too--perpermint or spearmint. This gives you all the mint flavoring you need for beverages, fruit desserts or cocktails, even salads. Other herbs for growing indoors are basil, particularly good in tomato mixtures; watercress; rose geranium; nasturtium and lemon verbena.

What I told you about the care of house plants in our chat a week or so ago, holds good also for your herbs, except that the herb garden will thrive in a cooler place generally, as most kitchen herbs are hardier. The herb garden needs plenty of cool fresh air, sunlight, and regular watering but not too much moisture. If green aphids or plant lice appear, use a nicotine spray. But you'll find that these insects are less likely to bother these fragrant herbs than houseplants. Occasionally give the plants some fertilizer, perhaps in the form of concentrated plant tablets, but if your soil is properly prepared and enriched you will have little occasion for the use of concentrated fertilizers during the winter. If you're growing watercress, remember that it needs plenty of lime in the soil.

Tomorrow: "Honey Uses."

